

# 2007 Farm Bill Rural Development Title:

## Investing in Rural America

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- **Makes critical investments in our rural communities**
  - Renews successful programs that provide vital healthcare, emergency and communications needs to underserved areas.
  - Adds innovative projects to promote economic development in the technology-driven 21<sup>st</sup> Century.
- **Ensures rural development dollars go to rural areas with the greatest need:**
  - Requires the Secretary to assess the varying definitions of rural used by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and to make recommendations to Congress to better target funds through rural development programs.
- **Addresses Health Care, Emergency, and First Responder Needs of Rural Areas:**
  - Authorizes the Rural Firefighters and Emergency Medical Service Assistance Program to provide improved emergency medical services in rural areas.
  - Creates a new grant program to assist rural health facilities in the key areas of health information technology and quality improvement.
  - Expands 9-1-1 access in rural areas by making telephone loans to public entities for facilities and equipment.
  - Provides grants for weather radio transmitters to increase coverage of rural areas by the emergency weather broadcast system.
- **Connects Rural America with the Rest of the World:**
  - Improves access to broadband telecommunications services in rural areas with a greater focus on the rural communities of greatest need.
  - Authorizes the Community Connect Grant Program to provide grants to finance broadband transmission in rural areas to currently unserved rural communities.
  - The bill extends and makes major changes to the existing broadband program to ensure a greater focus on rural areas and reduce the level of loans going to areas already sufficiently served by existing broadband providers.
  - Ensures the nation has a comprehensive rural broadband strategy.
- **Expands the Value-Added Agricultural Product Market Development Grant program**
  - Increases program funding to \$30 million per year, which provides grants for planning and working capital for marketing value-added products.
  - Creates a 10% set-aside for beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers
  - Creates a 10% set-aside for mid-tier value chains, which are strategic alliances between small to mid-sized farms and ranches and other supply chain partners that distribute the benefits of these partnerships across the supply chain.

### Farm Bill Rural Development Facts:

- USDA administers the greatest number of rural development programs and has the highest average of program funds going directly to rural counties (50%).
- USDA's rural development mission is to enhance rural communities by targeting financial and technical resources to areas of greatest need.
- USDA supports rural development initiatives through guaranteed loans, direct loans, grants, and through intermediaries.
- Farm Bills are the major legislative vehicle for addressing rural development issues. Since 1973 each Farm Bill has included a rural development title.
- The Rural Electrification Act of 1936, which brought electrical power and telephone service throughout rural America, is the first in a long line of rural development bills that help rural communities keep pace with the rest of America and the world.
- Rural development initiatives now move beyond agriculture and resource labor to focus on service, skilled-labor and technology-intensive economic development to create and retain an educated, talented workforce in rural America.

- **Advances Economic Development in Rural America by Attracting New Businesses, Improving Access to Technology, and Capturing New Markets:**
  - Authorizes a technology transfer program that provides technical information and resources for farmers practicing or transitioning to sustainable and organic farming practices.
  - Creates a new Rural Entrepreneur and Microenterprise Assistance Program to provide technical and financial assistance to micro-enterprises and small businesses in rural areas with less than 10 employees.
  - Extends Rural Business Opportunity Grants for job training in rural areas.
  - Extends Rural Cooperative Development Grants, a competitive program that establishes and operates centers for rural cooperative development.
  - Extends the Agriculture Innovation Center Demonstration Program, which provides technical assistance, outreach, and business and marketing planning to increase the viability, growth, and sustainability of value-added agricultural businesses.
  - Creates a preference within the Business and Industry Program for loans and loan guarantees for rural food enterprise entrepreneurs that process and distribute food locally and regionally.
  
- **Renews Critical Infrastructure That Works For Rural America:**
  - Renews Water and Waste Disposal Grants and Rural Water and Wastewater Circuit Rider Programs to help reduce water and waste disposal operating costs for rural areas and towns.
  - Renews the Emergency and Imminent Community Water Assistance Grant Program to provide technical assistance to communities that have had a significant decline in quantity or quality of drinking water.
  - Provides grants to qualified non-profit organizations for the construction of household water well systems in low-income areas.
  
- **Strengthens Successful Regional Partnerships**
  - Extends the Delta Regional Authority, a federal-state partnership that has funded 334 projects in its first five years and led to the investment of more than \$750 million in the region.
  - Extends and enhances the Northern Great Plains Regional Authority by enhancing flexibility for the Authority as well as including renewable energy projects among the target funding areas.
  - Establishes a National Board on Rural America that is to make planning and innovation grants to certified Regional Investment Boards.